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Review of *Art of the North American Indians: The Thaw Collection* Edited by Gilbert T. Vincent, Sherry Brydon, and Ralph T. Coe

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BOOK REVIEWS

Art of the North American Indians: The Thaw Collection. Edited by Gilbert T. Vincent, Sherry Brydon, and Ralph T. Coe. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000. Illustrations, bibliography, index. 464 pp. \$85.00.

This spectacular volume, with 260 works in color and 510 in black and white, records the Eugene and Clare Thaw collection of Native American art now housed in a wing of the Fenimore Art Museum in Cooperstown, New York. Introductory essays by Eugene Thaw, Gilbert Vincent, and Ralph Coe exploring the origins of the collection and its eventual move to Cooperstown set the stage for eight individual essays by various scholars introducing each of the cultural areas into which the holdings are divided. The Thaw collection was built around the collectors' aesthetic responses to individual works rather than anthropological interest, making it one of very few major collections of Native art to have developed in this manner.

Educated as an art historian, Eugene Thaw became a major art dealer specializing in European master drawings. Gradually his own collecting expanded and, with Clare Thaw's first purchase of a northern Athabascan beaded pillow sham, the couple's interest in Native American art began. Initially they focused on art that incorporated images of the American flag but soon included masterpieces not bound by that theme. Only when they began to think about a museum location for their holdings

did they seek works that allowed the collection to become more fully representative; nonetheless, they still maintained high quality in the expanding breadth of the works.

Given the Thaws' location in New York, it is not surprising that the collection grew particularly strong in Woodlands area art. Through the fortunate timing of other purchases detailed in Coe's essay, they also obtained extraordinary examples of Northwest Coast work. These are the foremost areas of the collection. The Plains section, discussed in a brief essay by Ted Brasser that examines the Southern, Central and Northern Plains with a very small Plateau section, is quite strong in late-nineteenth-century beadwork, much of it incorporating flag imagery. Among the outstanding pieces are a beaded violin case and a horse mask, both Lakota, from approximately 1899. Drawings on paper are also well represented, most by only a few pages from individual books, but the seventy-six drawings of the Lakota chief Black Hawk's ledger are important in their exploration of visions and genre scenes of Lakota life. Various other Plains art forms also appear, ranging from painted hides from the first half of the nineteenth century to later nineteenth-century sculpture. An 1830-40 Northern Plains shirt and a pair of leggings are true masterpieces.

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